

[R. A. Evans]

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Range-lore

Elizabeth Doyle

San Angelo, Texas.

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RANGE-LORE

Born in Princetown, Kentucky in 1867, Mr. R. A. Evans of Eldorado, Texas, was a member of one of the first wagon trains which went from that place to Springfield, Missouri. They remained there only a short time before going on to Kansas, then from Kansas back to Missouri, twice crossing what was then the Indian Territory and escaping dangerous attacks from the Indians only by the most careful precautions.

"There were seventy-two wagons in the train which trekked across the Indian Territory from Springfield, Missouri, carrying settlers to Kansas with a hope to profit from the wonderful harvest crops of which they had heard." Thus reminisced Mr. Evans as he enthusiastically delved into past memories and facts. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 "There were plenty of bad Indians," he continued, "and we expected an attack at any time especially at night. It was then that the men would make a circle of wagons, forming a corral for the horses and placing guards out all around this circle. In the center a big fire was kept burning all night and the settlers took turns sleeping in the wagons. I slept at the foot of father's bed and if I heard any strange noise I'd grab him by the foot and awaken him. I lived in an agony of fear that we would all be exterminated by the Indians. We saw plenty

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of the very wildest ones. They all wore blankets and rode horses without saddles or bridles and couldn't do anything but grunt.

"We took up a homestead and lived there about a year, during which time we planted a big corn crop and the grasshoppers ate it all up in one day. We sold out then and went back to Missouri, making the second time we had crossed the Indian Territory without harm.

"In 1874 we went in another wagon train to McClennan County and settled twenty miles southeast of Waco near a little town called Old Perry. We bought the best of black fertile land there for \$1.50 per acre but were lured by the glowing rumors of the west, and sold out there at a nice profit and landed in dear old Tom Green County, when it was a great deal larger then it is now. The ranch we bought was on the Concho River twenty-two miles south of 3 San Angelo, which was our post office at that time and garrisoned by the negro soldiers.

"My father died of measles and was buried out there on the ranch. Mother soon sold out and moved to Christoval. She received as a gift, one acre of land where Christoval now stands. I cut the shrubs off the lot and hauled the lumber for the Christoval hotel. In fact, I am the first man ever to unload a stick of lumber in that town.

"I was 22 years old when I went to work for the Half Circle Six at the head of Dove Creek, which was the largest outfit ever known south of the Colorado River. I stayed with the chuck wagon six years working all the way from the Rio Grande back to the Concho. Many times I was sent across the Pecos with a pack horse outfit to work for weeks at a time and I seldom saw a white person at these times. Wells of water were very scarce and we had to depend on the water holes and rivers for the stock as well as ourselves. I have traveled for miles with a lantern tied on the chuck wagon bows, leading herds out of dry countries.

"When I went to work for the Half Circle Six, mustangs and antelopes were as common as jack rabbits. I would get old Cutter (my cutting horse) and hunt down the antelopes by the dozens. Cutter was my best friend. There wasn't anything to be done with cows that

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he couldn't do. 4 "Smoky was my worst enemy. He would buck, bite, bawl, rear up, and fall back with me.

"My boss knowing that I was a great lover of horses always sent me to the big horse works, which in some places amounted to a business almost equal to the cattle business. He told me that anything I found over one year old without a mother was mine. When I left his outfit I had around 200 head of horses of my own on the range. The branding went on very much as cattle branding, rounding them up and dragging the colts out and branding them.

"I was known as one of the best tree ropers on the range. This meant getting up in a tree, tying my rope to a limb, and having the boys run the horses under the tree as I would rope the most choice ones. I have had wild ones to rip the limb off and drag me, limb and all, quite aways.

"Looking back over western life, some of it looks bad but I could go over it all again with pleasure, leaving out only a few of the worst things.

"In 1892 a village and post office was started by C. C. West and others six miles north of the present site of Eldorado, in the old Vermont pasture. It was called Verand and was fast becoming a lively little village, when it was learned that the land title was not any good and every thing was moved to Eldorado. 5 "I have seen hundreds of sections of good tillable land here worth now from \$20.00 to \$50.00 per acre sell for 50¢ per acre.

"I have been in the real estate business for several years now and have sold land from \$2.50 per acre up to \$50.00. The land rushes were the biggest excitements ever known in or around Eldorado. I have gone through them all and have heard the click of guns more than once in the man stampedes which would take place on these occasions. One particular instance always stood out as being most amusing to me and that was when a small fellow grabbed the papers from the hands of a much larger brother, placed them with

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his own and went through between the man's feet and legs like a gopher. He made his goal and filed the claim for both his brother and himself.

"If I could get a few of the old boys together so's they could help me remember, I'd write a book sometime but we are all getting too old to remember it all by ourselves any more."
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BIBLIOGRAPHY

R. A. Evans, Eldorado, Texas, interviewed, November 15, 1937.